

IN THE CLAIMS:

1)-8) (Cancelled)

9) (Original) A method of forming a tobacco bead by means of a forming conveyor (3) for conveying the tobacco bead (2); a pressing device (11) for compacting portions (14) of the tobacco bead (2) equally spaced with a given spacing (15); and a shaving device (21) coordinated with said forming conveyor (3) and for removing a surplus tobacco portion (22) off the tobacco bead (2); the method providing for regulating a first distance (D2), between the shaving device (21) and the forming conveyor (3) as a function of the characteristics of the tobacco bead (2); and the method being characterized by regulating a second distance (D1) between the pressing device (11) and the forming conveyor (3), and regulating the second distance (D1) independently of the first distance (D2).

10) (Currently amended) A The method ~~as~~ ~~claimed in~~ of Claim 9, and further regulating said first distance (D2) by means of a first actuator (36), and regulating said second distance (D1) by means of a second actuator (19) independent of said first actuator (36).

11) (Currently amended) A- The method as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 9, and further estimating a linear travelling speed (VL) of the forming conveyor (3), and regulating a second distance (D1) between said pressing device (11) and said forming conveyor (3) as a function of said linear travelling speed (VL) of the forming conveyor (3).

12) (Currently amended) A- The method as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 11, and further reducing said second distance (D1) alongside an increase in said linear travelling speed (VL) of the forming conveyor (3).

13) (Currently amended) A- The method as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 11, and further estimating the linear travelling speed (VL) of said forming conveyor (3) by direct measurement of the linear travelling speed (VL).

14) (Currently amended) A- The method as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 11, and further estimating the linear travelling speed (VL) of said forming conveyor (3) by measuring a physical quantity related to the linear travelling speed (VL).

15) (Currently amended) A- The method as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 14, and further estimating the linear travelling speed (VL) of said forming conveyor (3) by means of a measurement of said tobacco bead (2).

16) (Currently amended) A- The method as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 15, and further estimating the linear travelling speed (VL) of said forming conveyor (3) by measuring a height (H) of said tobacco bead (2).

17) (Currently amended) A- The method as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 15, and further estimating the linear travelling speed (VL) of said forming conveyor (3) by measuring the density of said tobacco bead (2).

18) (Currently amended) A- The method as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 15, and further estimating the linear travelling speed (VL) of said forming conveyor (3) by measuring the mass of tobacco per unit of length of said tobacco bead (2).

19) (Currently amended) A- The method as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 9, and further measuring the density of said tobacco bead (2), and regulating said second distance (D1) as a function of said density of the tobacco bead (2).

20) (Currently amended) A- The method as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 19, and further increasing said second distance (D1) alongside an increase in said density of the tobacco bead (2).

21) (Currently amended) A- The method ~~as~~
~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 9, and further measuring, down-
stream from said shaving device (21), a mass of tobacco
per unit of length of said tobacco bead (2), and reg-
ulating said second distance (D1) as a function of said
mass of tobacco per unit of length of the tobacco bead
(2).

22) (Currently amended) A- The method ~~as~~
~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 21, and further increasing said
second distance (D1) alongside an increase in said mass
of tobacco per unit of length of the tobacco bead (2).

23) (Currently amended) A- The method ~~as~~
~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 9, and further measuring a height
(H) of said tobacco bead (2), and regulating said
second distance (D1) as a function of said height (H)
of the tobacco bead (2).

24) (Currently amended) A- The method ~~as~~
~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 23, and further increasing said
second distance (D1) alongside a reduction in said
height (H) of the tobacco bead (2).

25) (Currently amended) A unit for forming a tobacco bead, the unit (1) comprising a forming conveyor (3) for conveying the tobacco bead (2) at a given linear speed (VL); a pressing device (11) for compacting portions (14), equally spaced with a given spacing (15), of the tobacco bead (2); a shaving device (21) coordinated with said forming conveyor (3) and for removing a surplus tobacco portion (22) off the tobacco bead (2); and first regulating means (36) for regulating a first distance (D2) between the shaving device (21) and the forming conveyor (3) as a function of the characteristics of the tobacco bead (2); and wherein the unit (1) being characterized by comprising comprises a second regulating means (19) for regulating a second distance (D1) between the pressing device (11) and the forming conveyor (3) substantially independently with respect to said first regulating means (36).

26) (Currently amended) ~~A~~ The unit ~~as claimed in of~~ Claim 25, wherein said first regulating means (36) comprise a first actuator (36), and said second regulating means (19) comprise a second actuator (19) independent of the first actuator (36).

27) (Currently amended) ~~A~~ The unit ~~as claimed in of~~ Claim 25, and further comprising estimating means (38) for estimating a linear travelling speed (VL) of the forming conveyor (3); said second regulating means (19) regulating said second distance (D1) as a function of said linear travelling speed (VL) of the forming conveyor (3).

28) (Currently amended) A- The unit as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 27, and further comprising sensor means (41) for measuring said linear travelling speed (VL) of the forming conveyor (3); said estimating means (38) being connected to the sensor means (41) to estimate the linear travelling speed (VL) of said forming conveyor (3) by direct measurement of the linear travelling speed (VL).

29) (Currently amended) A- The unit as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 27, and further comprising further sensor means (40; 42) for measuring a physical quantity related to said linear travelling speed (VL) of the forming conveyor (3); said estimating means (38) being connected to the further sensor means (40; 42) to estimate the linear travelling speed (VL) of said forming conveyor (3) by means of the measurement of said physical quantity related to the linear travelling speed (VL).

30) (Currently amended) A- The unit as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 29, wherein said further sensor means (40; 42) effect a measurement of said tobacco bead (2).

31) (Currently amended) A- The unit as ~~elaimed-in~~ of Claim 30, wherein said further sensor means (42) measure a vertical height (H) of said tobacco bead (2).

32)-38) (Cancelled)